William Pedrotti

UNIV 391

Dr. Schwartz

The Blue Sweater

The New York Times best seller *The Blue Sweater, Bridging the Gap Between the Rich and the Poor in an Interconnected World,* by Jacqueline Novogratz details her life in the career of development. In this autobiography of sorts, Jacqueline professes her experiences in development, the good and the bad in such a way that the reader gains a sense of understanding as to the great struggles that are inexplicably linked to development in developing nations, but also the great sense of reward associated with knowing that you’ve set up a program or institution that benefits those who want to benefit themselves.

The narrative is broken up into three distinct parts, the beginning where Jacqueline explains where she is from, and her life growing up and putting herself through school at the University of Virginia and getting a degree in business. From there she promptly gets a job working for Chase bank but leaves the promising career to help the less fortunate. While this portion was necessary for a best selling novel it was ultimately very dry, adding very little to the novel.

The second portion details her early struggles in helping developing countries. While her motives were pure and her drive to help other unbounded she faced and had to come to terms with many failures and defeats. These were in large part due to her “western” ideals, that she knew exactly how these people needed to be helped. She didn’t start seeing success in her efforts until her time in Rwanda, where along side of a few capable, intelligent and influential Rwandan women she was able to set up “ Duterimbere” a microfinance bank focused on giving the poorest of the poor women small loans to help them set small businesses that they then could use to raise themselves out of poverty, and pay back the loans they were given. This section of the book was by far the most interesting and applicable to the class as it was directly linked to helping those wanted to help themselves, help themselves. In her time in Rwanda Jacqueline also helped set up a small bakery for poor single women who were able to make a life for themselves off the revenue the bakery produced.

The third and final section of the novel was after she left Rwanda to attend Stanford’s graduate business school and went on to found the Acumen fund, a large fund interested in offering loans to social entrepreneur in developing countries whose goals were to help the poorest of the poor. Most of this section was beyond the scope of this class in the sense that she was working at Rockefeller and setting up American based institutions focused on fostering the next generation of international social “movers and shakers”. The final section did however regain relevance to this class in describing a couple of loans the Acumen fund had given that were resulting in great change for the poorest of the poor.

What I learned from this book is something we all have been taught in the course of this class, for change to take place in foreign countries it must be done by the local people. Jacqueline only saw positive results once she stopped trying to solve the problems herself and instead listened and responded to the needs of the locals.